

*by the same author*



POEMS

OUT OF THE PICTURE

THE EARTH COMPELS

AUTUMN JOURNAL

# PLANT AND PHANTOM

poems by  
LOUIS MACNEICE

Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square  
London

*First published in April Mcmxli  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square London W.C. 1  
Printed in Great Britain by  
R. MacLehose and Company Limited  
The University Press Glasgow  
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To  
ELEANOR CLARK



ein Zwiespalt und Zwitter von Pflanze und von Gespenst  
NIETZSCHE



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## Acknowledgments

*The Spectator, The New Statesman and Nation, The Times Literary Supplement, New Writing, The Listener, Horizon.*

*The New Republic, The Nation, Poetry (Chicago), The Kenyon Review, The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, Furioso, The Partisan Review.*

Several of these poems have appeared previously in *The Last Ditch*, published by the Cuala Press



## Prognosis

Goodbye, Winter,  
The days are getting longer,  
The tea-leaf in the teacup  
Is herald of a stranger.

Will he bring me business  
Or will he bring me gladness  
Or will he come for cure  
Of his own sickness?

With a pedlar's burden  
Walking up the garden  
Will he come to beg  
Or will he come to bargain?

Will he come to pester,  
To cringe or to bluster,  
A promise in his palm  
Or a gun in his holster?

Will his name be John  
Or will his name be Jonah  
Crying to repent  
On the Island of Iona?

Will his name be Jason  
Looking for a seaman  
Or a mad crusader  
Without rhyme or reason?

What will be his message—  
War or work or marriage?  
News as new as dawn  
Or an old adage?

Will he give a champion  
Answer to my question  
Or will his words be dark  
And his ways evasion?

Will his name be Love  
And all his talk be crazy?  
Or will his name be Death  
And his message easy?

*Spring, 1939*

## Stylite

The saint on the pillar stands,  
The pillar is alone,  
He has stood so long  
That he himself is stone;  
Only his eyes  
Range across the sand  
Where no-one ever comes  
And the world is banned.

Then his eyes close,  
He stands in his sleep,  
Round his neck there comes  
The conscience of a rope,  
And the hangman counting  
Counting to ten—  
At nine he finds  
He has eyes again.

The saint on the pillar stands,  
The pillars are two,  
A young man opposite  
Stands in the blue,  
A white Greek god,  
Confident, with curled  
Hair above the groin  
And his eyes on the world.

*March, 1940*

## Conversation

Ordinary people are peculiar too:  
Watch the vagrant in their eyes  
Who sneaks away while they are talking with you  
Into some black wood behind the skull,  
Following un-, or other, realities,  
Fishing for shadows in a pool.

But sometimes the vagrant comes the other way  
Out of their eyes and into yours  
Having mistaken you perhaps for yesterday  
Or for tomorrow night, a wood in which  
He may pick up among the pine-needles and burrs  
The lost purse, the dropped stitch.

Vagrancy however is forbidden; ordinary men  
Soon come back to normal, look you straight  
In the eyes as if to say 'It will not happen again',  
Put up a barrage of common sense to baulk  
Intimacy but by mistake interpolate  
Swear-words like roses in their talk.

*March, 1940*

## Departure Platform

Love, my love, it is high time to travel,  
The brass bell clangs escape  
And summer in a porter's cap will punch our tickets  
And launch us where the shining lines unravel.

We have been there before though we have not seen it—  
The land that was always ours  
Whose stones are our bones', whose rivers our blood's  
kindred,  
A land without a meaning unless we mean it.

The distance opens like a mouth to meet us  
Wantonly tongue to tongue  
Consummating our dreams by night, defeating  
The daily thoughts which day by day defeat us.

And on this quest in company with many  
We hoard our hopes a year  
To blow in a fortnight—a dandelion puffball  
Telling the past time and the spent penny.

So pack like the others, be sure you look your best for  
This year's unlikely chance;  
Whether it is France or Wales or the Canary Islands  
The place—who knows—is a person to be well-dressed  
for.

Unlikely; and, were that so, I should be jealous  
Unless that god of the place  
Could fuse his person with mine for your enjoyment—  
But whether he could there is nobody can tell us.



But on the off chance pack—your summer frocks and  
sandals

And a pair of gloves for towns  
And one small bottle of scent—Chanel or Coty—  
And your long ear-rings twisted like Christmas candles.

It leaves at three-fifteen—with lifting pistons—  
The zero hour;  
Opposite in corner seats we hope for nearness  
And dearness in what is wrongly called the distance.

*July, 1938*

## Plant and Phantom

Man: a flutter of pages,  
Leaves in the Sibyl's cave,  
Shadow changing from dawn to twilight,  
"Murmuration" of corn in the wind,  
A shaking of hands with hallucinations,  
Hobnobbing with ghosts, a pump of blood,  
Mirage, a spider dangling  
Over chaos and man a chaos.

Who cheats the 'pawky' Fates  
By what he does, not is,  
By what he makes, imposing  
On flux an architectonic—  
Cone of marble, calyx of ice,  
Spandrel and buttress, iron  
Loops across the void,  
Stepping stones in the random.

Man: a dance of midges,  
Gold glass in the sunlight,  
Prattle of water, palaver  
Of starlings in a disused  
Chimney, a gimcrack castle,  
Seaweed tugging the rocks,  
Guttering candles, the Northern  
Lights and the Seventh Wave.

Whose life is a bluff, professing  
To follow the laws of Nature,  
In fact a revolt, a mad  
Conspiracy and usurpation,

Smuggling over the frontier  
Of fact a sense of value,  
Metabolism of death,  
Re-orchestration of world.

Man: a riot of banners,  
Bulge in the wind, a prism,  
Organ-pipes in the sunset,  
Orgy of brains and glands,  
Thunder-crackle and the bounce of hail,  
Wink of wings and fog's delusion,  
A rampant martyr, a midnight  
Echo, a forest fire.

Who felt with his hands in empty  
Air for the Word and did not  
Find it but felt the aura,  
Dew on the skin, could not forget it.  
Ever since has fumbled, intrigued,  
Clambered behind and beyond, and learnt  
Words of blessing and cursing, hoping  
To find in the end the Word Itself.

*September, 1940*

## Entirely

If we could get the hang of it entirely  
It would take too long;  
All we know is the splash of words in passing  
And falling twigs of song,  
And when we try to eavesdrop on the great  
Presences it is rarely  
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate  
Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely  
In somebody else's arms  
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's  
Yammering fire alarms  
But, as it is, the spears each year go through  
Our flesh and almost hourly  
Bell or siren banishes the blue  
Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely  
And all the charts were plain  
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,  
A prism of delight and pain,  
We might be surer where we wished to go  
Or again we might be merely  
Bored but in brute reality there is no  
Road that is right entirely.

*March, 1940*

# The British Museum Reading Room

Under the hive-like dome the stooping haunted readers  
Go up and down the alleys, tap the cells of knowledge—

Honey and wax, the accumulation of years—

Some on commission, some for the love of learning,

Some because they have nothing better to do

Or because they hope these walls of books will deaden

The drumming of the demon in their ears.

Cranks, hacks, poverty-stricken scholars,

In pince-nez, period hats or romantic beards

And cherishing their hobby or their doom

Some are too much alive and some are asleep

Hanging like bats in a world of inverted values,

Folded up in themselves in a world which is safe and  
silent:

This is the British Museum Reading Room.

Out on the steps in the sun the pigeons are courting,

Puffing their ruffs and sweeping their tails or taking

A sun-bath at their ease

And under the totem poles—the ancient terror—

Between the enormous fluted Ionic columns

There seeps from heavily jowled or hawk-like foreign  
faces

The guttural sorrow of the refugees.

*July, 1939*

## London Rain

The rain of London pimples  
The ebony street with white  
And the neon-lamps of London  
Stain the canals of night  
And the park becomes a jungle  
In the alchemy of night.

My wishes turn to violent  
Horses black as coal—  
The randy mares of fancy,  
The stallions of the soul—  
Eager to take the fences  
That fence about my soul.

Across the countless chimneys  
The horses ride and across  
The country to the channel  
Where warning beacons toss,  
To a place where God and No-God  
Play at pitch and toss.

Whichever wins I am happy  
For God will give me bliss  
But No-God will absolve me  
From all I do amiss  
And I need not suffer conscience  
If the world was made amiss.

Under God we can reckon  
On pardon when we fall  
But if we are under No-God

Nothing will matter at all,  
Adultery and murder  
Will count for nothing at all

So reinforced by logic  
As having nothing to lose  
My lust goes riding horseback  
To ravish where I choose,  
To burgle all the turrets  
Of beauty as I choose.

But now the rain gives over  
Its dance upon the town,  
Logic and lust together  
Come dimly tumbling down,  
And neither God nor No-God  
Is either up or down.

The argument was wilful,  
The alternatives untrue,  
We need no metaphysics  
To sanction what we do  
Or to muffle us in comfort  
From what we did not do.

Whether the living river  
Began in bog or lake,  
The world is what was given,  
The world is what we make.  
And we only can discover  
Life in the life we make.

So let the water sizzle  
Upon the gleaming slates,  
There will be sunshine after  
When the rain abates  
And rain returning duly  
When the sun abates.

My wishes now come homeward,  
Their gallopings in vain,  
Logic and lust are quiet  
And again it starts to rain;  
Falling asleep I listen  
To the falling London rain.

*July, 1939*



## Picture Galleries

Strolling, guidebook in hand, along the varnished par-  
quet

We meet the calm of opium in the long galleries,  
An under-water dream, a closed

World whose people live in frames, the flames of their  
self-centred

Affections frozen, the bread and fruit on their tables  
fossil,

A curfew—once for all—imposed

Upon their might-be-wanderings; their might-be  
applications

For resurrection in advance refused.

Yet were violent monsters, whom the retiring ocean  
Left embedded in sandstone: Michelangelo's tortured

Urge to God, Greco's fugue of fire,  
Goya's sleight-of-hand that fooled his patrons, Blake's  
ingenuous

Usurpation of reality, Daumier watching the bubbles  
rising

From mouths of the drowned; panic, desire,  
Fantasy, joy of the earth—the rhythm lurks in the canvas,  
sometimes.

If we look long, is more than we can bear.

Or viewed as history they remind us of what we always  
Would rather forget—that what we are or prefer is  
conditioned

By circumstances, that evil and good  
Are relative to ourselves who are creatures of period;  
seeing

That what, for instance, Zurbaran found in his  
Carthusians

Serene in white, with rope girdle and hood,  
Lautrec discovered in brothel and circus; the answers  
were even  
Even though we to-day may find them odd.

A curator rings a bell: tourists, connoisseurs and loafers,  
School-children with their teachers, hustle for the door,  
many

Of their faces tired or showing relief  
At leaving a silence which was a crowd of voices, the  
language,  
Like that of a paralytic hard to follow; they descend the  
staircase

Into the open air, a sheaf  
Of inklings fluttering in their minds, and now even the  
open  
Air is half-articulate and unsafe.

*August, 1940*

# Trilogy for X

## I

When clerks and navvies fondle  
Beside canals their wenches,  
In rapture or in coma  
The haunches that they handle,  
And the orange moon sits idle  
Above the orchard slanted—  
Upon such easy evenings  
We take our loves for granted.

But when, as now, the creaking  
Trees on the hills of London  
Like bison charge their neighbours  
In wind that keeps us waking  
And in the draught the scolloped  
Lampshade swings a shadow,  
We think of love bound over—  
The mortgage on the meadow.

And one lies lonely, haunted  
By limbs he half remembers,  
And one, in wedlock, wonders  
Where is the girl he wanted;  
And some sit smoking, flicking  
The ash away and feeling  
For love gone up like vapour  
Between the floor and ceiling.

But now when winds are curling  
The trees do you come closer,  
Close as an eyelid fasten  
My body in darkness, darling;

Switch the light off and let me  
Gather you up and gather  
The power of trains advancing  
Further, advancing further.

## II

And love hung still as crystal over the bed  
And filled the corners of the enormous room;  
The boom of dawn that left her sleeping, showing  
The flowers mirrored in the mahogany table.

O my love, if only I were able  
To protract this hour of quiet after passion,  
Not ration happiness but keep this door for ever  
Closed on the world, its own world closed within it.

But dawn's waves trouble with the bubbling minute,  
The names of books come clear upon their shelves,  
The reason delves for duty and you will wake  
With a start and go on living on your own.

The first train passes and the windows groan,  
Voices will hector and your voice become  
A drum in tune with theirs, which all last night  
Like sap that fingered through a hungry tree  
Asserted our one night's identity.

### III

March gave clear days,  
    Gave unaccustomed sunshine,  
Prelude to who knows  
    What dead end or downfall;  
O my love, to  
    Browse in the painted prelude.

Regent's Park was  
    Gay with ducks and deck-chairs,  
Omens were absent,  
    Cooks bought cloves and parsley;  
O my love, to  
    Stop one's ear to omens.

Pigeons courting, the cock  
    Like an eighteenth-century marquis  
Puffing his breast and dragging  
    His fantail waltzwise;  
O my love, the  
    Southward trains are puffing.

Nursemaids gossiped,  
    Sun was bright on pram-paint,  
Gold in the breeze the arrow  
    Swivelled on church-tops;  
But Living drains the living  
    Sieve we catch our gold in.

Toy sail skidding on Whitestone  
    Pond at the peak of London,

Challenge of bells at morning,  
Crocus and almond;  
O my love, my  
Thoughts avoid the challenge.

But the rumbling summer rolls  
A register behind us—  
March to April to May  
To denser summer—  
And the road is dusty, the goal  
Unknown we march to.

Rampant on Europe headlines  
Herald beasts of fable;  
Backward the eyes to ancient  
Codes—vellum and roseleaf;  
From the moving train of time the  
Fields move backward.

And now the searchlights  
Play their firemen's hoses,  
Evil their purport  
Though their practice lovely,  
Defence and death being always  
Collateral, coæval.

And now the soldier  
Tightens belt and outlook,  
Eyes on the target,  
Mind in the trigger-finger,  
And a flight of lead connecting  
Self and horizon.

And now, and last, in London  
Poised on the edge of absence  
I ask for a moment's mention  
Of days the days will cancel,  
Though the long run may also  
Bring what we ask for.

*Summer, 1938*

# The Coming of War

(*Dublin, Cushendun, the West of Ireland, and back*)

## I

### *Dublin*

Grey brick upon brick,  
Declamatory bronze  
On sombre pedestals—  
O'Connell, Grattan, Moore—  
And the brewery tugs and the swans  
On the balustraded stream  
And the bare bones of a fanlight  
Over a hungry door  
And the air soft on the cheek  
And porter running from the taps  
With a head of yellow cream  
And Nelson on his pillar  
Watching his world collapse.

This was never my town,  
I was not born nor bred  
Nor schooled here and she will not  
Have me alive or dead  
But yet she holds my mind  
With her seedy elegance,  
With her gentle veils of rain  
And all her ghosts that walk  
And all that hide behind  
Her Regency façades—  
The catcalls and the pain,  
The glamour of her squalor,  
The bravado of her talk.



The lights jig in the river  
With a concertina movement  
And the sun comes up in the morning  
Like barley-sugar on the water  
And the mist on the Wicklow hills  
Is close, as close  
As the peasantry were to the landlord,  
As the Irish to the Anglo-Irish,  
As the killer is close one moment  
To the man he kills,  
Or as the moment itself  
Is close to the next moment.

She is not an Irish town  
And she is not English,  
Historic with guns and vermin  
And the cold renown  
Of a fragment of Church latin,  
Of an oratorical phrase.  
But O the days are soft,  
Soft enough to forget  
The lesson better learnt,  
The bullet on the wet  
Streets, the crooked deal,  
The steel behind the laugh,  
The Four Courts burnt.

Fort of the Dane,  
Garrison of the Saxon,  
Augustan capital  
Of a Gaelic nation,  
Appropriating all  
The alien brought,

You give me time for thought  
And by a juggler's trick  
You poise the toppling hour—  
O greyness run to flower,  
Grey stone, grey water  
And brick upon grey brick.

## II

### *Cushendun*

Fuchsia and ragweed and the distant hills  
Made as it were out of clouds and sea:  
All night the bay is plashing and the moon  
Marks the break of the waves.

Limestone and basalt and a whitewashed house  
With passages of great stone flags  
And a walled garden with plums on the wall  
And a bird piping in the night.

Forgetfulness: brass lamps and copper jugs  
And home-made bread and the smell of turf or flax  
And the air a glove and the water lathering easy  
And convolvulus in the hedge.

Only in the dark green room beside the fire  
With the curtains drawn against the winds and waves  
There is a little box with a well-bred voice:  
What a place to talk of War.

### III

#### *County Sligo*

In Sligo the country was soft; there were turkeys  
Gobbling under sycamore trees  
And the shadows of clouds on the mountains moving  
Like browsing cattle at ease.

And little distant fields were sprigged with haycocks  
And splashed against a white  
Roadside cottage a welter of nasturtium  
Deluging the sight,

And pullets pecking the flies from around the eyes of  
heifers  
Sitting in farmyard mud  
Among hydrangeas and the falling ear-rings  
Of fuchsias red as blood.

But in Mayo the tumbledown walls went leap-frog  
Over the moors,  
The sugar and salt in the pubs were damp in the casters  
And the water was brown as beer upon the shores

Of desolate loughs, and stumps of hoary bog-oak  
Stuck up here and there  
And as the twilight filtered on the heather  
Water-music filled the air,

And when the night came down upon the bogland  
With all-enveloping wings  
The coal-black turfstacks rose against the darkness  
Like the tombs of nameless kings.

#### IV

##### *Galway*

O the crossbones of Galway,  
The hollow grey houses,  
The rubbish and sewage,  
The grass-grown pier,  
And the dredger grumbling  
All night in the harbour:  
The war came down on us here.

Salmon in the Corrib  
Gently swaying  
And the water combed out  
Over the weir  
And a hundred swans  
Dreaming on the harbour:  
The war came down on us here.

The night was gay  
With the moon's music  
But Mars was angry  
On the hills of Clare  
And September dawned  
Upon willows and ruins:  
The war came down on us here.

#### V

##### *Clonmacnois*

Eastward again, returning to our so-called posts,  
We went out of our way to look at Clonmacnois—  
A huddle of tombs and ruins of anonymous men  
Above the Shannon dreaming in the quiet rain.

You millenarian dead, why should I arraign,  
Being a part of it, the stupidity of men  
Who cancel the voices of the heart with barbarous noise  
And hide the barren facts of death in censored posts?

## VI

### *Cushendun Again*

The sky is a lather of stars,  
Jupiter makes a stain upon the bay  
But death is on the waters and no-one  
Can drive the war away.

The black horns of the headlands  
Grip my gullet tight;  
There is a dead calf on the beach  
Like a black sack in the night

The tide is out and the idle  
Starlit wavelets play  
But none of any of all the stars above me  
Can drive the war away.

## VII

Why, now it has happened,  
Should the clock go on striking to the firedogs  
And why should the rooks be blown upon the evening  
Like burnt paper in a chimney?

And why should the sea maintain its turbulence,  
Its elegance,

And draw a film of muslin down the sand  
With each receding wave?

And why, now it has happened,  
Should the atlas still be full of the maps of countries  
We never shall see again?

And why, now it has happened,  
And doom all night is lapping at the door,  
Should I remember that I ever met you—  
Once in another world?

*August–September, 1939*

## Meeting Point

Time was away and somewhere else,  
There were two glasses and two chairs  
And two people with the one pulse  
(Somebody stopped the moving stairs):  
Time was away and somewhere else.

And they were neither up nor down,  
The stream's music did not stop  
Flowing through heather, limpid brown,  
Although they sat in a coffee shop  
And they were neither up nor down.

The bell was silent in the air  
Holding its inverted poise—  
Between the clang and clang a flower,  
A brazen calyx of no noise:  
The bell was silent in the air.

The camels crossed the miles of sand  
That stretched around the cups and plates;  
The desert was their own, they planned  
To portion out the stars and dates:  
The camels crossed the miles of sand.

Time was away and somewhere else.  
The waiter did not come, the clock  
Forgot them and the radio waltz  
Came out like water from a rock:  
Time was away and somewhere else.

Her fingers flicked away the ash  
That bloomed again in tropic trees:  
Not caring if the markets crash  
When they had forests such as these,  
Her fingers flicked away the ash.

God or whatever means the Good  
Be praised that time can stop like this,  
That what the heart has understood  
Can verify in the body's peace  
God or whatever means the Good.

Time was away and she was here  
And life no longer what it was,  
The bell was silent in the air  
And all the room a glow because  
Time was away and she was here.

*April, 1939*



## A Toast

urred and drawled and crooning sounds,  
urred and suave and sidling smells,  
bs of dew, the bells of buds,  
n going down in crimson suds—  
is on me and these are yours.

and and sculpted and urgent beasts,  
ere and there and nowhere birds,  
ngues of fire, the words of foam,  
rdling stars in the night's dome—  
s is on me and these are yours.

ice and grace and muscle of man  
alance of his body and mind,  
eeps a trump behind his brain  
istinct flicks it out again—  
is is on me and these are yours.

ourage of eyes, the craft of hands,  
gay feet, the pulse of hope,  
will that flings a rope—though hard—  
atch the future off its guard—  
is is on me and these are yours.

luck and pluck and plunge of blood,  
wealth and spilth and sport of breath,  
sleep come down like death above  
fever and the peace of love—  
his is on me and these are yours.

*May, 1939*

## Order to view

It was a big house, bleak;  
Grass on the drive;  
We had been there before  
But memory, weak in front of  
A blistered door, could find  
Nothing alive now;  
The shrubbery dripped, a crypt  
Of leafmould dreams; a tarnished  
Arrow over an empty stable  
Shifted a little in the almost wind,

And wishes were unable  
To rise; on the garden wall  
The pear trees had come loose  
From rotten loops; one wish,  
A rainbow bubble, rose,  
Faltered, broke in the dull  
Air—What was the use?  
The bell-pull would not pull  
And the whole place, one might  
Have supposed, was deadly ill:  
The world was closed,

And remained closed until  
A sudden angry tree  
Shook itself like a setter  
Flouncing out of a pond  
And beyond the sombre line  
Of limes a cavalcade  
Of clouds rose like a shout of  
Defiance. Near at hand

where in a loose-box  
he neighed  
When the curtains flew out of  
windows; the world was open.

*March, 1940*

# Novelettes

## I

### *The Old Story*

The old story is true of charms fading;  
He knew her first before her charm was mellow—  
Slim; surprise in her eyes; like a woodland creature  
Crept abroad who found the world amazing,

Who, afterwards maturing, yet was dainty,  
Light on her feet and gentle with her fingers;  
Put on a little flesh, became an easy  
Spreadeagled beauty for Renaissance painters.

And then she went; he did not see her after  
Until by the shore of a cold sea in winter  
With years behind her and the waves behind her  
Drubbing the memory up and down the pebbles.

Flotsam and wrack; the bag of old emotions;  
Watch in the swirl her ten years back reflections—  
White as a drowning hand, then gone for ever;  
Here she stands who was twenty and is thirty.

The same but different and he found the difference  
A surgeon's knife without an anaesthetic;  
He had known of course that this happens  
But had not guessed the pain of it or the panic,  
And could not say 'My love', could hardly  
Say anything at all, no longer knowing  
Whom he was talking to but watched the water  
Massing for action on the cold horizon.

*Summer, 1939*

## II

### *Suicide*

He had fought for the wrong causes,  
Had married the wrong wife,  
Had invested rashly, had lost  
His health and his reputation,  
His fortune and his looks.

Who in his youth had gone  
Walking on the crown of the road  
Under delectable trees  
And over irresponsible moors  
To find the rainbow's end;

And was now, at fortynine,  
Living in a half timbered  
Cottage with a pale  
Mistress and some gardening  
Books and a life of Napoleon.

When she left him he took  
The shears and clipped the hedge  
And then taking a shotgun  
As if for duck went out  
Walking on the crown of the road.

*Summer, 1939*

### III

#### *Les Sylphides*

Life in a day: he took his girl to the ballet;  
Being shortsighted himself could hardly see it—  
The white skirts in the grey  
Glade and the swell of the music  
Lifting the white sails.

Calyx upon calyx, canterbury bells in the breeze  
The flowers on the left mirror to the flowers on the right  
And the naked arms above  
The powdered faces moving  
Like seaweed in a pool.

Now, he thought, we are floating—ageless, oarless—  
Now there is no separation, from now on  
You will be wearing white  
Satin and a red sash  
Under the waltzing trees.

But the music stopped, the dancers took their curtain,  
The river had come to a lock—a shuffle of programmes—  
And we cannot continue down  
Stream unless we are ready  
To enter the lock and drop.

So they were married—to be the more together—  
And found they were never again so much together,  
Divided by the morning tea,  
By the evening paper,  
By children and tradesmen's bills.

Waking at times in the night she found assurance  
In his regular breathing but wondered whether  
It was really worth it and where  
The river had flowed away  
And where were the white flowers.

*Summer, 1939*

#### IV

##### *The Gardener*

He was not able to read or write,  
He did odd jobs on gentlemen's places  
Cutting the hedge or hoeing the drive  
With the smile of a saint,  
With the pride of a feudal chief,  
*For he was not quite all there.*

Crippled by rheumatism  
By the time his hair was white,  
He would reach the garden by twelve  
His legs in soiled puttees,  
A clay pipe in his teeth,  
A tiny flag in his cap  
A white cat behind him,  
And his eyes a cornflower blue.

And between the clack of the shears  
Or the honing of the scythe  
Or the rattle of the rake on the gravel  
He would talk to amuse the children,  
He would talk to himself or the cat  
Or the robin waiting for worms  
Perched on the handle of the spade;  
Would remember snatches of verse  
From the elementary school  
About a bee and a wasp  
Or the cat by the barndoor spinning;  
And would talk about himself for ever—  
You would never find his like—  
Always in the third person;



And would level his stick like a gun  
(With a glint in his eye)  
Saying 'Now I'm a Frenchman'—  
*He was not quite right in the head.*

He believed in God—  
The Good Fellow Up There—  
And he used a simile of Homer  
Watching the falling leaves,  
And every year he waited for the Twelfth of July,  
Cherishing his sash and his fife  
For the carnival of banners and drums.  
He was always claiming but never  
Obtaining his old age pension,  
For he did not know his age.  
And his rheumatism at last  
Kept him out of the processions.  
And he came to work in the garden  
Later and later in the day,  
Leaving later at night;  
In the damp dark of the night  
At ten o'clock or later  
You could hear him mowing the lawn,  
The mower moving forward  
And backward, forward and backward  
For he mowed while standing still;  
*He was not quite up to the job.*

But he took a pride in the job,  
He kept a bowl of cold  
Tea in the crotch of a tree,  
Always enjoyed his food  
And enjoying honing the scythe

And making the potato drills  
And putting the peasticks in;  
And enjoyed the noise of the corncrake,  
And the early hawthorn hedge  
Peppered black and green,  
And the cut grass dancing in the air—  
*Happy as the day was long.*

Till his last sickness took him  
And he could not leave his house  
And his eyes lost their colour  
And he sat by the little range  
With a finch in a cage and a framed  
Certificate of admission  
Into the Orange Order,  
And his speech began to wander  
And memory ebbed  
Leaving upon the shore  
Odd shells and heads of wrack  
And his soul went out on the ebbing  
Tide in a trim boat  
To find the Walls of Derry  
Or the land of the Ever Young.

*Summer, 1939*

V

*Christina*

It all began so easy  
With bricks upon the floor  
Building motley houses  
And knocking down your houses  
And always building more.

The doll was called Christina,  
Her under-wear was lace,  
She smiled while you dressed her  
And when you then undressed her  
She kept a smiling face.

Until the day she tumbled  
And broke herself in two  
And her legs and arms were hollow  
And her yellow head was hollow  
Behind her eyes of blue.

He went to bed with a lady  
Somewhere seen before  
He heard the name Christina  
And suddenly saw Christina  
Dead on the nursery floor.

*July, 1939*

## VI

### *The Expert*

The dilatory prophet, flicking the ash  
On the Bokhara rug, said 'Maybe yes;  
When spring comes the markets will maybe crash,  
Only the Unknown God can get us out of this mess.

Man is a political animal admittedly  
But, politics being incalculable, I shall  
With your permission pour myself another; I see  
Nothing for it but to be animal.'

And putting the weight of his doctorates aside  
Took three fingers of Scotch and a cube of ice  
And thought that, could he announce that he had died,  
And so was no longer an expert, it would be nice;

And drank till two, staring into the fire  
Seeing half-naked girls, and then having collected  
His courtesy and his hat, soft-peddalling desire  
Went out to find the world as bad as he expected.

Drunk and alone among the indifferent lights  
In stark unending streets of granite and glass  
He ducked his head to avoid illusory stalactites  
And fell, his brain ringing with the noise of brass

Captions; the groundswell of the pavement, steady  
As fate, rose up and caught him, rolled him below  
A truck—this ex-professor who had already  
Outlived his job of being in the know.

*March, 1940*

## VII

### *Provence*

It is a decade now since he and she  
Spent September in Provence: the vineyard  
Was close about the house; mosquitoes and cicadas  
Garrulous day and night; and by the sea  
Thighs and shoulders tanning themselves and one  
Gay old man in particular who never  
Missed a day, a glutton for the sun,  
But did not bathe. He and she with swimming  
Every noon were wild for food; a Basque  
Woman cooked on charcoal—aubergine with garlic,  
And there were long green grapes exploding on the palate  
And smelling of eau de Cologne. They had nothing to ask  
Except that it should go on. Watching the vintage—  
A file of bullock carts and the muzzle of each  
Animal munching purple—he suddenly said  
'We must get married soon.' Down on the beach,  
His wife and three of his three children dead,  
An old man lay in the sun, perfectly happy.

*September, 1940*

## VIII

### *The Preacher*

He carried a ball of darkness with him, unrolled it  
To find his way by in streets and rooms,  
Every train or boat he took was Charon's ferry,  
He never left the Catacombs;

He never smiled but spun his strands of black  
Among the secular crowd who, when he tripped their feet  
Saw their own faces in the wet street, saw  
Their hell beneath the street.

Among old iron, cinders, sizzling dumps,  
A world castrated, amputated, trepanned,  
He walked in the lost acres crying 'Repent  
For the Kingdom of Death is at hand'.

He took the books of pagan art and read  
Between the lines or worked them out to prove  
Humanism a palimpsest and God's  
Anger a more primal fact than love.

And in the city at night where drunken song  
Climbed the air like tendrils of vine  
He bared a knife and slashed the roots and laid  
Another curse on Cain. The sign

Of the cross between his eyes, his mouth drawn down,  
He passed the flower-sellers and all  
The roses reeked of an abattoir, the gardenias  
Became the décor of a funeral.

ys clenched, an eagle  
of vice;  
uilt, block upon block,  
f sacrifice.

e in a bare room  
is accounts; lying in bed  
e his deeds, drew back  
ed thread,

1 the chink beneath the door,  
him, all  
spair a ball of black  
he centre of the ball.

*March, 1940*

## Débâcle

They had built it up—but not for this the lean  
And divinatory years,  
The red-eyed pioneers  
Facing the dark and making the desert green.

Not for this the pale inventor's lamp  
Alight till dawn, the hands  
Weary with sifting sands,  
The burst of nuggets on the miners' camp.

Vision and sinew made it of light and stone;  
Not grateful nor enchanted  
Their heirs took it for granted  
Having a world—a world that was all their own.

At sundown now the windows had gone gold  
For half an hour; a quick  
Chill came off the brick  
Walls and the flesh was suddenly old and cold.

Crumbling between the fingers, under the feet,  
Crumbling behind the eyes,  
Their world gives way and dies  
And something twangs and breaks at the end of the street.

*September, 1940*



## Exile

Now he can hardly press  
The heavy pedals of thought,  
Tired of what he wants  
And sick of what he ought,  
He is content to watch  
The window fill with snow  
Making even the Future  
Seem long ago.

Knowing that in Europe  
All the streets are black  
And that stars of blood  
Star the almanac,  
One half-hour's reprieve  
Drowns him in the white  
Physical or spiritual  
Inhuman night.

*March, 1940*

## Death of an Actress

I see from the paper that Florrie Forde is dead—  
Collapsed after singing to wounded soldiers,  
At the age of sixty-five. The American notice  
Says no doubt all that need be said

About this one-time chorus girl; whose rôle  
For more than forty stifling years was giving  
Sexual, sentimental, or comic entertainment,  
A gaudy posy for the popular soul.

Plush and cigars: she waddled into the lights,  
Old and huge and painted, in velvet and tiara,  
Her voice gone but around her head an aura  
Of all her vanilla-sweet forgotten vaudeville nights.

With an elephantine shimmy and a sugared wink  
She threw a trellis of Dorothy Perkins roses  
Around an audience come from slum and suburb  
And weary of the tea-leaves in the sink;

Who found her songs a rainbow leading west  
To the home they never had, to the chocolate Sunday  
Of boy and girl, to cowslip time, to the never-  
Ending weekend Islands of the Blest.

In the Isle of Man before the war before  
The present one she made a ragtime favourite  
Of 'Tipperary', which became the swan-song  
Of troop-ships on a darkened shore;

And during Munich sang her ancient quiz  
Of *Where's Bill Bailey?* and the chorus answered,  
Muddling through and glad to have no answer:  
Where's Bill Bailey? How do *we* know where he is!

Now on a late and bandaged April day  
In a military hospital Miss Florrie  
Forde has made her positively last appearance  
And taken her bow and gone correctly away.

Correctly. For she stood  
For an older England, for children toddling  
Hand in hand while the day was bright. Let the wren and  
    robin  
Gently with leaves cover the Babes in the Wood.

*May, 1940*

## Bar-Room Matins

Popcorn peanuts clams and gum:  
We whose Kingdom has not come  
Have mouths like men but still are dumb

Who only deal with Here and Now  
As circumstances may allow:  
The sponsored programme tells us how.

And yet the preachers tell the pews  
What man misuses God can use:  
Give us this day our daily news

That we may hear behind the brain  
And through the sullen heat's migraine  
The atavistic voice of Cain:

'Who entitled you to spy  
From your easy heaven? Am I  
My brother's keeper? Let him die.'

And God in words we soon forget  
Answers through the radio set:  
'The curse is on his forehead yet.'

Mass destruction, mass disease:  
We thank thee, Lord, upon our knees  
That we were born in times like these

When with doom tumbling from the sky  
Each of us has an alibi  
For doing nothing—Let him die.

Let him die, his death will be  
A drop of water in the sea,  
A journalist's commodity.

Pretzels crackers chips and beer:  
Death is something that we fear  
But it titillates the ear.

Anchovy almond ice and gin:  
All shall die though none can win;  
Let the Untergang begin—

Die the soldiers, die the Jews,  
And all the breadless homeless queues.  
Give us this day our daily news.

*July, 1940*

# Flight of the Heart

Heart, my heart, what will you do?  
There are five lame dogs and one deaf-mute  
All of them with demands on you.

I will build myself a copper tower  
With four ways out and no way in  
But mine the glory, mine the power.

And what if the tower should shake and fall  
With three sharp taps and one big bang?  
What would you do with yourself at all?

I would go in the cellar and drink the dark  
With two quick sips and one long pull,  
Drunk as a lord and gay as a lark.

But what when the cellar roof caves in  
With one blue flash and nine old bones?  
How, my heart, will you save your skin?

I will go back where I belong  
With one foot first and both eyes blind,  
I will go back where I belong  
In the fore-being of mankind.

*October, 1940*

## Refugees

With prune-dark eyes, thick lips, jostling each other  
These, disinterred from Europe, throng the deck  
To watch their hope heave up in steel and concrete  
Powerful but delicate as a swan's neck,

Thinking, each of them, the worst is over  
And we do not want any more to be prominent or rich,  
Only to be ourselves, to be unmolested  
And make ends meet—an ideal surely which

Here if anywhere is feasible. Their glances  
Like wavering antennae feel  
Around the sliding limber towers of Wall Street  
And count the numbered docks and gingerly steal

Into the hinterland of their own future  
Behind this excessive annunciation of towers,  
Tracking their future selves through a continent of  
strangeness.

The liner moves to the magnet; the quay flowers

With faces of people's friends. But these are mostly  
Friendless and all they look to meet  
Is a secretary who holds his levée among ledgers,  
Tells them to take a chair and wait . . .

And meanwhile the city will go on, regardless  
Of any new arrival, trains like prayers  
Radiating from stations haughty as cathedrals,  
Tableaux of spring in milliners' windows, great affairs

Being endorsed on a vulcanite table, lines of washing  
Feebly garish among grimy brick and dour  
Iron fire-escapes; barrows of cement are rumbling  
Up airy planks; a florist adds a flower

To a bouquet that is bound for somebody's beloved  
Or for someone ill; in a sombre board-room great  
Problems wait to be solved or shelved. The city  
Goes on but you, you will probably find, must wait

Till something or other turns up. Something-or-Other  
Becomes an expected angel from the sky;  
But do not trust the sky, the blue that looks so candid  
Is non-committal, frigid as a harlot's eye.

Gangways—the handclasp of the land. The resurrected,  
The brisk or resigned Lazaruses, who want  
Another chance, go trooping ashore. But chances  
Are dubious. Fate is stingy, recalcitrant

And officialdom greets them blankly as they fumble  
Their foreign-looking baggage; they still feel  
The movement of the ship while through their  
imagination  
The known and the unheard-of constellations wheel.

*September, 1940*



## Jehu

Peace on New England, on the shingled white houses, on  
golden  
Rod and the red Turkey carpet spikes of sumach. The  
little  
American flags are flapping in the graveyard. Continuous  
Chorus of grasshoppers. Fleece  
Of quiet around the mind. Honey-suckle, phlox and  
smoke-bush,  
Hollyhocks and nasturtium and corn on the cob. And the  
pine wood  
Smelling of outmoded peace.

A king sat over the gate looking to the desert. A spiral  
Of dust came towards him, a special messenger asking  
Anxiously 'Is it peace?' The heavy eyebrows lowered,  
He answered 'What have I  
To do with peace?' and the messenger mopped the sweat  
and obedient  
Took his place behind the king who still sat scanning  
Miles of desert and sky.

Negative prospect; sand in the lungs; blood in the sand;  
deceiving  
Mirage of what were once ideals or even motives  
And in this desert even a ghost can hardly  
Live—but in the long run what  
Have I to do with life? He got up blandly, harnessed his  
horses  
And furiously drove, his eyeballs burning and the  
chariot's  
Axles burning hot.

Someone sat in a window with a new coiffure, her raddled  
Face, a Muse's possibly once but now a harlot's,  
Smirked at the charioteer who, looking past her, signalled  
    To the maids to throw her down  
And they threw her down and the wheels went over her  
    ribs and the carcase,  
The one-time inspiration of artists, the toast of kings, was  
    abandoned  
    To the scavenger dogs of the town.

And now the sand blows over Kent and Wales where we  
    may shortly  
Learn the secret of the desert's purge, of the mad driving,  
The cautery of the gangrened soul, though we are not  
    certain  
    Whether we shall stand beside  
The charioteer, the surgeon, or shall be one with the  
    pampered  
Queen who tittered in the face of death, unable to  
    imagine  
    The meaning of the flood tide.

*August, 1940*

## O'Connell Bridge

Barrel-organ music:  
The cold gold falls  
From the lamps on the Liffey  
In the chilly wind  
And the crinkling river  
Shivers the lights,  
And night's companions  
Are far to find.

Flotsam and jetsam  
Our one-while loves  
Blown like bubbles  
In the trough of the sea,  
Who are not the only  
Lonely in bed:  
I dread the darkness—  
A mound on me.

Barrel-organ music—  
A hackney cockney tune,  
A rain of riches  
In a lady's lap;  
I give in answer  
Not dance or spoken  
Token but only  
A coin in a cap.

*October, 1939*

## The Death-Wish

It being in this life forbidden to move  
Too lightly, people, over-cautious, contrive  
To save their lives by weighting them with dead  
Habits, hopes, beliefs, anything not alive,  
Till all this ballast of unreality sinks  
The boat and all our thinking gurgles down  
Into the deep sea that never thinks.

Which being so, it is not surprising that  
Some in their impatience jump the rails,  
Refusing to wait the communal failure, preferring  
The way the madman or the meteor fails,  
Deceiving themselves to think their death uncommon,  
And mad to possess the unpossessable sea  
As a man in spring desires to die in woman.

*May, 1940*

# Autobiography

In my childhood trees were green  
And there was plenty to be seen.

*Come back early or never come.*

My father made the walls resound,  
He wore his collar the wrong way round.

*Come back early or never come.*

My mother wore a yellow dress;  
Gently, gently, gentleness.

*Come back early or never come.*

When I was five the black dreams came;  
Nothing after was quite the same.

*Come back early or never come.*

The dark was talking to the dead;  
The lamp was dark beside my bed.

*Come back early or never come.*

When I woke they did not care;  
Nobody, nobody was there.

*Come back early or never come.*

When my silent terror cried,  
Nobody, nobody replied.

*Come back early or never come.*

I got up; the chilly sun  
Saw me walk away alone.

*Come back early or never come.*

*September, 1940*

## The Ear

There are many sounds which are neither music nor  
voice,

There are many visitors in masks or in black glasses  
Climbing the spiral staircase of the ear. The choice  
Of callers is not ours. Behind the hedge  
Of night they wait to pounce. A train passes,  
The thin and audible end of a dark wedge.

We should like to lie alone in a deaf hollow  
Cocoon of self where no person or thing would speak;  
In fact we lie and listen as a man might follow  
A will o' the wisp in an endless eyeless bog,  
Follow the terrible drone of a cock chafer, or the bleak  
Oracle of a barking dog.

*April, 1940*

## Evening in Connecticut

Equipoise: becalmed  
Trees, a dome of kindness;  
Only the scissory noise of the grasshoppers;  
Only the shadows longer and longer.

The lawn a raft  
In a sea of singing insects,  
Sea without waves or mines or premonitions:  
Life on a china cup.

But turning. The trees turn  
Soon to brocaded autumn.  
Fall. The fall of dynasties; the emergence  
Of sleeping kings from caves—

Beard over the breastplate,  
Eyes not yet in focus, red  
Hair on the back of the hands, unreal  
Heraldic axe in the hands.

Unreal but still can strike.  
And in defence we cannot call on the evening  
Or the seeming-friendly woods—  
Nature is not to be trusted,

Nature whose falls of snow,  
Falling softer than catkins,  
Bury the lost and over their grave a distant  
Smile spreads in the sun.



Not to be trusted, no,  
Deaf at the best; she is only  
And always herself, Nature is only herself,  
Only the shadows longer and longer.

*September, 1940*

# Octets

## I

### *Business Men*

The two men talking business  
So easily in the train  
Project themselves upon me  
Just as the window pane

Reflects their faces, and I  
Find myself in a trance  
To hear two strangers talking  
The same language for once.

## II

### *Night Club*

After the legshows and the brandies  
And all the pick-me-ups for tired  
Men there is a feeling  
Something more is required.

The lights go down and eyes  
Look up across the room;  
Salome comes in, bearing  
The head of God knows whom.

### III

#### *Didymus*

Refusing to fall in love with God, he gave  
Himself to the love of created things,  
Accepting only what he could see, a river  
Full of the shadows of swallows' wings

That dipped and skimmed the water; he would not  
Ask where the water ran or why.  
When he died a swallow seemed to plunge  
Into the reflected, the wrong sky.

*October-November, 1939*

## Plurality

It is patent to the eye that cannot face the sun  
The smug philosophers lie who say the world is one;  
World is other and other, world is here and there,  
Parmenides would smother life for lack of air  
Precluding birth and death; his crystal never breaks—  
No movement and no breath, no progress nor mistakes,  
Nothing begins or ends, no-one loves or fights,  
All your foes are friends and all your days are nights  
And all the roads lead round and are not roads at all  
And the soul is muscle-bound, the world a wooden ball.  
The modern monist too castrates, negates our lives  
And nothing that we do, make or become survives,  
His terror of confusion freezes the flowing stream  
Into mere illusion, his craving for supreme  
Completeness means he chokes each orifice with tight  
Plaster as he evokes a dead ideal of white  
All-white Universal, refusing to allow  
Division or dispersal—Eternity is now  
And Now is therefore numb, a fact he does not see  
Postulating a dumb static identity  
Of Essence and Existence which could not fuse without  
Banishing to a distance belief along with doubt,  
Action along with error, growth along with gaps;  
If man is a mere mirror of God, the gods collapse.  
No, the formula fails that fails to make it clear  
That only change prevails, that the seasons make the year  
That a thing, a beast, a man is what it is because  
It is something that began and is not what it was,  
Yet is itself throughout, fluttering and unfurled,  
Not to be cancelled out, not to be merged in world,  
Its entity a denial of all that is not it,

Its every move a trial through chaos and the Pit,  
An absolute and so defiant of the One  
Absolute, the row of noughts where time is done,  
Where nothing goes or comes and Is is one with Ought  
And all the possible sums alike resolve to nought.  
World is not like that, world is full of blind  
Gulfs across the flat, jags against the mind,  
Swollen or diminished according to the dice,  
Foaming, never finished, never the same twice.  
You talk of Ultimate Value, Universal Form—  
Visions, let me tell you, that ride upon the storm  
And must be made and sought but cannot be maintained,  
Lost as soon as caught, always to be regained,  
Mainspring of our striving towards perfection, yet  
Would not be worth achieving if the world were set  
Fair, if error and choice did not exist, if dumb  
World should find its voice for good and God become  
Incarnate once for all. No, perfection means  
Something but must fall unless there intervenes  
Between that meaning and the matter it should fill  
Time's revolving hand that never can be still.  
Which being so and life a ferment, you and I  
Can only live by strife in that the living die,  
And, if we use the word Eternal, stake a claim  
Only to what a bird can find within the frame  
Of momentary flight (the value will persist  
But as event the night sweeps it away in mist).  
Man is man because he might have been a beast  
And is not what he was and feels himself increased,  
Man is man in as much as he is not god and yet  
Hankers to see and touch the pantheon and forget  
The means within the end and man is truly man  
In that he would transcend and flout the human span:

A species become rich by seeing things as wrong  
And patching them, to which I am proud that I belong.  
Man is surely mad with discontent, he is hurled  
By lovely hopes or bad dreams against the world,  
Raising a frail scaffold in never-ending flux,  
Stubbornly when baffled fumbling the stubborn crux  
And so he must continue, raiding the abyss  
With aching bone and sinew, conscious of things amiss,  
Conscious of guilt and vast inadequacy and the sick  
Ego and the broken past and the clock that goes too quick,  
Conscious of waste of labour, conscious of spite and hate,  
Of dissension with his neighbour, of beggars at the gate,  
But conscious also of love and the joy of things and the  
power  
Of going beyond and above the limits of the lagging hour,  
Conscious of sunlight, conscious of death's inveigling  
touch,  
Not completely conscious but partly—and that is much.

*August, 1940*

## Plain Speaking

In the beginning and in the end the only decent  
Definition is tautology: man is man,  
Woman woman, and tree tree, and world world,  
Slippery, self-contained; catch as catch can.

Which when caught between the beginning and end  
Turn other than themselves, their entities unfurled,  
Flapping and overlapping—a tree becomes  
A talking tower, and a woman becomes world.

Catch them in nets, but either the thread is thin  
Or the mesh too big or, thirdly, the fish die  
And man from false communion dwindles back  
Into a mere man under a mere sky.

But dream was dream and love was love and what  
Happened happened—even if the judge said  
It should have been otherwise—and glitter glitters  
And I am I although the dead are dead.

*March, 1940*



## Perdita

The glamour of the end attic, the smell of old  
Leather trunks—Perdita, where have you been  
Hiding all these years? Somewhere or other a green  
Flag is waving under an iron vault  
And a brass bell is the herald of green country  
And the wind is in the wires and the broom is gold.

Perdita, what became of all the things  
We said that we should do? The cobwebs cover  
The labels of Tyrol. The time is over-  
Due and in some metropolitan station  
Among the clank of cans and the roistering files  
Of steam the caterpillars wait for wings.

*March, 1940*

## The Dowser

An inkling only, whisper in the bones  
Of strange weather on the way,  
Twitch of the eyelid, shadow of a passing bird.  
It is coming some time soon.

What? or who? An inkling only,  
Adumbration of unknown glory  
Drew to the feet of Saint Francis where the waves  
Broke, an army of fish.

Humming wires; feel of a lost limb  
Cut off in another life;  
Trance on the tripod; effulgence  
Of headlights beyond the rise in the road.

And the hazel rod bent, dipping, contorting,  
Snake from sleep; they were right  
Who remembered some old fellow  
(Dead long ago) who remembered the well.

'Dig', he said, 'dig',  
Holding the lantern, the rod bent double,  
And we dug respecting his knowledge,  
Not waiting for morning, keenly

Dug: the clay was heavy  
Two hours heavy before  
The clink of a spade revealed  
What or whom? We expected a well—

A well? A mistake somewhere . . .  
More of a tomb . . . Anyway we backed away  
From the geyser suddenly of light that erupted, sprayed  
Rocketing over the sky azaleas and gladioli.

*September, 1940*

## The Return

All the lost interpretations,  
All the unconsummated consummations,  
All the birds that flew and left the big sky empty  
Come back throwing shadows on our patience.

Bethlehem is desolate and the stables  
Cobwebbed, mute; below each Tower of Babel's  
Sentrydom of night, inside the bleak  
Glass of cafés chairs are piled on tables.

Notwithstanding which, notwithstanding  
The hospital—the icicles round the landing—  
Expecting Birth, we know that it will come  
Sooner or later, banding

Together the good daemons, the defiance  
And lolloping vulcanite of sea-lions,  
The harlequinade of water through a sluice,  
Tigers in the air, and in the teeth of science

The acclamation of earth's returning daughter,  
Jonquils out of hell, and after  
Hell the imperative of joy, the dancing  
Fusillade of sunlight on the water.

*February, 1940*

## Cradle Song

Sleep, my darling, sleep;  
The pity of it all  
Is all we compass if  
We watch disaster fall.  
Put off your twenty-odd  
Encumbered years and creep  
Into the only heaven,  
The robbers' cave of sleep.

The wild grass will whisper,  
Lights of passing cars  
Will streak across your dreams  
And fumble at the stars;  
Life will tap the window  
Only too soon again,  
Life will have her answer—  
Do not ask her when.

When the winsome bubble  
Shivers, when the bough  
Breaks, will be the moment  
But not here or now.  
Sleep and, asleep, forget  
The watchers on the wall  
Awake all night who know  
The pity of it all.

*October, 1940*